

Orchestra Chair X 13

By HOWARD FIELDING

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THE train from New York due at Bridgeport at 6:20 p. m. ran into the station a few minutes late and with an unusual panting and bustle, as if confessing that it was in a hurry. From the rear platform of the last car there alighted a tall young man who did not wait for the train to come to a full stop. He wore a long, dark gray raincoat, with the collar turned up, and a black alpine hat was pulled well down over his forehead. His general aspect as he dodged around the end of the depot suggested that of one who is hurrying through a smart shower without an umbrella, yet the weather had cleared within the last hour, and, moreover, the man was under shelter all the time.

If it was the stranger's intention to escape observation he failed signally. An exceptionally keen eye marked all his doings. Before his foot was firmly on the boards of the platform as he stepped down from the car this thought had dashed through the brain of a certain young man who lounged near by upon the shady side of a pillar which supported the roof. "That fellow looks queer."

The eye and thought were Stephen Kent's, and Mr. Kent was a reporter on one of the Bridgeport papers, therefore an individual who was glad to see anything or anybody that was queer. He was a youth of quick decision, and he lost no time upon this occasion.

The stranger crossed the street beyond the station in a great hurry and entered the bar of a hotel. Kent went in by the main door and gained the bar in another way, yet almost simultaneously with the object of his interest.

The man in the raincoat took his place by a window and observed with obvious interest, even a measure of anxiety, the crowd which poured out of the building. It may have been a quarter of an hour that he stood there, and meanwhile Kent was sitting beside a small table pretending to read an evening paper.

The light from an electric lamp struck through the window in such a way that the stranger could not avoid it as he looked out. It beat strongly upon his face, revealing to Kent a very interesting matter—namely, that the man in the raincoat was naturally of a fair complexion, though he seemed to be dark because his eyebrows were penciled and his mustache blackened.

Obviously the disguise had been hastily assumed, but the reporter was of the opinion that it must make a radical change in the man's appearance. It was probable that his hair had always been dark brown, and for that reason the gray eyes and very light colored eyebrows and mustache would have been the more notable.

Presently it became clear that the stranger was satisfied with what he had seen—or it may have been with what he hadn't seen—from the window. He turned away and walked across the street into the restaurant which is in the depot.

Few people were eating there, but it seemed that they were too many for the man in the raincoat, and he was about to go away when he observed a flight of stairs leading up to another dining room on the second floor. Five minutes later, when Kent ascended the stairs, he beheld the stranger sitting in a corner with a newspaper held up before his face. Not counting two wait-

two men were together, but the fact had no especial significance, for Bond was the first arrival and could hardly have known that the other was coming. Moreover, in ordinary circumstances Bond always ate in that room at that hour. The detective was a man of such regular habits and his routine was so well known to Kent that the reporter would have been willing to say with confidence not only where Bond had been at any particular hour of that day, but also where he would be during the remainder of it. He would finish his dinner at 7:30 precisely; he would smoke a short cigar of a certain brand while standing before the door of a certain cigar store (or just within it if it should rain), and then he would go to a theater and occupy a seat on the center aisle in the last row of the orchestra.

Kent was strongly tempted to sit down at the table with the detective, although he knew that this would be a breach of strict professional etiquette. He sat down in a corner and ordered some dinner. The waitress who served him was a nice girl, but very loquacious, so much so that Kent felt obliged to warn her in a whisper not to say anything that should reveal the nature of his occupation.

"I guess there must be something doing this evening," said the girl, glancing at the stranger out of the corner of her eye. "Mr. Bond gave me the same advice."

Presently the passenger from New York called a messenger boy and sent him out upon an errand. He seemed to be giving somewhat elaborate instructions to the boy, and Kent felt obliged to get some hint of their nature. In this matter the waitress proved to be an adequate source of information.

"He sent the boy up to the Park theater to buy a ticket," she whispered. "He said that he wanted it in the last row of the orchestra."

"The last row in the orchestra?" repeated Kent, glancing at Bond.

It was in the nature of a coincidence, for if the boy should do his errand well the mysterious stranger and Detective Bond were certain to spend the evening very close together.

"Can this be a fly cop' from New York?" Kent asked himself. "Have he and Bond got something up? Do they expect to nab somebody in the theater?"

It was a question impossible to answer without more data. But at any rate the case was worth watching. The messenger boy returned with the ticket after a considerable delay, during which the stranger seemed to be somewhat nervous. It was then 7:20, and by all the laws of nature Cyrus Field Bond should leave the restaurant in exactly one minute. He did not do so, and the matter of a big story was no longer in doubt.

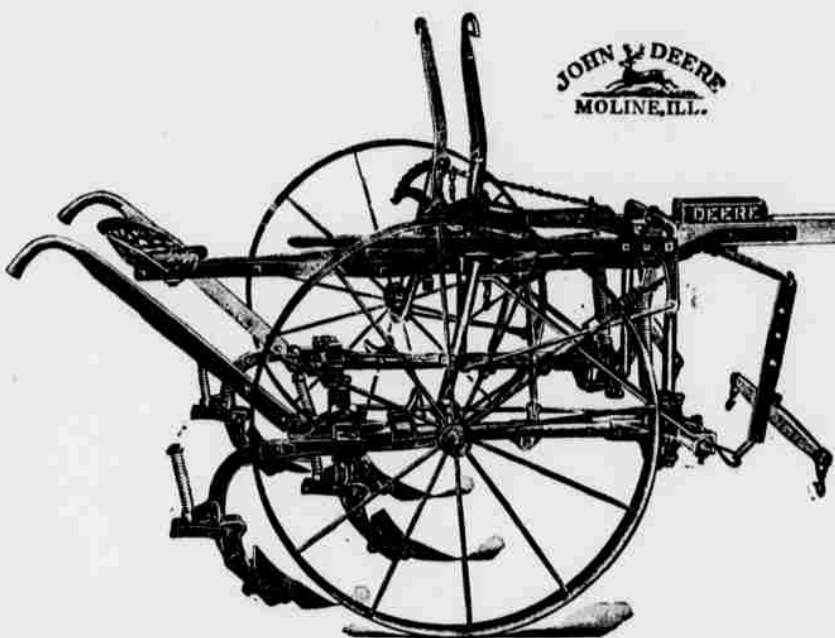
It was ten minutes before 8 when Bond left the room, and he went no farther than the restaurant below, where he leaned against the cigar stand and conversed with the man behind it. He had not been there long when the mysterious stranger paid his check and departed from the depot, quietly attended by Kent, who walked upon the other side of the street.

There was a considerable crowd about the entrance of the theater, and, indeed, it was not easy to get in, for it was the night of a "first production upon any stage," and both the play and the company had been well advertised in advance. So far as Kent could judge, the stranger was relieved in mind by the sight of the throng of people, for it was certain that he stood small chance of recognition in so close an assembly. Indeed, the reporter had great fear for a minute or two that he had been thrown off the trail; that the buying of the ticket had been a mere ruse, and that the man of mystery had mingled with the crowd merely for the purpose of working his way secretly out again and leaving the theater.

But when Kent had secured an admission ticket—no seats then remaining—and had made his way inside he perceived the unknown seated in the last row of the orchestra, still clad in the raincoat and with the collar turned up around his neck. In the aisle seat of that same line of chairs sat Detective Bond, and it flashed across Kent's mind that if the two men had desired to exchange a few words in such a manner as to attract no attention they would have had an excellent opportunity when the stranger passed Bond on the way to his seat.

Was it possible that they had arranged this matter by secret signals in the restaurant? And, if so, what was the game? Were they so placed in the theater that some person or persons whom they desired to entrap would be seated between them? The stranger was in chair X 13, the sixth seat from Bond's, which was X 1. Of the five seats intervening Nos. 3, 5 and 7 were occupied by people who were known to Kent, people of a very harmless sort who could have no share in this mystery. Nos. 9 and 11 were vacant, and, though Kent knew that the tickets must have been sold, he beheld the places still empty when the house was darkened and the curtain rose. Almost immediately, as if they had been waiting for a signal, two persons appeared, an elderly man and a young and very pretty woman, both strangers in Bridgeport to the best of Kent's knowl-

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"HARRY! YOU HERE?"

edge and better. They were ushered into the waiting chairs. As they passed Bond the reporter saw no sign of recognition, but the stranger betrayed himself. Beyond a doubt he knew these people and was extremely desirous to avoid attracting their special attention. He pulled up his collar a little farther on the side toward them and turned his head so that no clear view of his face could be had. Later he managed to assume a not notably unnatural position, with his right elbow on the arm of his chair and his hand sheltering his visage.

It was the young lady who was next to the man in the raincoat, and she seemed to be entirely oblivious of his presence. She kept her attention fixed upon the stage and seemed to take a very deep interest in the performance, whispering frequently to the elderly man beside her, as if making comments and criticisms. Kent, who was very near this group, could not hear what was said, but the man in the raincoat must have heard much of it, and he seemed to be listening secretly.

At the close of the first act, when the lights in the house were turned up, the man in the raincoat sank down still farther into his chair and effaced himself with even greater caution. Presently, to Kent's surprise, Detective Bond arose and strolled out of the auditorium. He went to the smoking room downstairs, and Kent ventured to follow him. No one else was there.

"Hello!" said Bond as the reporter entered. "What do you think of the play?"

"Blast the play!" replied Kent. "I've got something else on my mind."

"Have, eh?" was the response. "Well, so have I."

"Now, look here, Cyrus Bond," said Kent earnestly. "I've always used you well, and you've always found me square. I've never given away anything you've told me until you've said that I could. Isn't that so? Well, such being the case, I ask you to let me in on this game that's going on tonight."

"Game!" repeated Bond. "Who's that fellow in the raincoat?"

"Blamed if I know," answered the detective, almost as if the confession were a relief to his feelings. "That's on the level. I don't. Only wish I did, for I'm of your opinion, my boy. There's something up. I caught on to that man at the station. He's disguised, and he is mighty anxious to escape observation. He knows those people next to him, and I don't. They're strangers here. They came up on the 5:15 train, and they were 'on the quiet'—a little, not so hard as he is."

"What do you make of it?"

"If I was to give a guess," said Bond, "I'd say that that fellow was young Blaisdell, the man who turned the trick at that New York bank the other day, and that the other two are relatives, his father and sister, perhaps. They look a mighty sight like him. Have you caught on to that?"

"I have," responded Kent. "But that fellow doesn't answer Blaisdell's description very well."

"He doesn't," responded Bond, rubbing his head reflectively, "and that's a fact."

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this transformation so simply effected. Suddenly the pretty girl turned toward the man of mystery, and she uttered a sound that seemed to combine a cry of terror with a burst of hysterical laughter.

"Harry!" she cried. "Harry! You here? It can't be!"

At this the elderly man wheeled as if he had been struck a blow.

"Why—why?" he exclaimed, unable to find words to express his astonishment. "S-s-s-h, for the love of heaven!" whispered the young man. "I promised Millie solemnly that I wouldn't come. She'd have fallen in a faint on the stage if she had known that I was in the house. But—but I couldn't stay away. My own first play, and my wife in the leading part! That's too much to ask of any man, isn't it, dad?"

"Well, less than that was too much to ask of us," replied his father. "We promised Millie that we wouldn't come, as you know, but we sneaked down here!"

"Sneaked!" echoed the author. "Why, I came in disguise, and I crept around like a criminal. I was afraid some blamed fool would see me on the street and tell Millie. But she'll forgive me after such a success!"

Detective Bond laid a hand upon Kent's shoulder and whispered in his ear.

"Which of us?" he asked, "is the blamed fool mentioned by our mysterious friend?"

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Citation by Publication.

THE STATE OF TEXAS,
To the sheriff or any Constable of Randall County, Greeting:

You are hereby commanded to summon H. S. Burnham by making publication of this Citation, once in each week for four successive weeks previous to the return day hereof, in some newspaper published in your County, if there be a newspaper published therein, but if not, then in any newspaper published in the 47th Judicial District; but if there be no newspaper published in said Judicial District, then in a newspaper published in the nearest District to said 47th Judicial District to appear at the next regular term of the County Court of Randall County, to be held at the Court House thereof, in Canyon City, Texas, on the 2nd Monday in July A. D. 1904 the same being the 11th day of July A. D. 1904 then and there to answer a petition filed in said Court on the 7th day of May A. D. 1904 in a suit, numbered on the docket of said Court No. 163, wherein Guber, Hume & Kenyon, a corporation is Plaintiff, and H. S. Burnham is Defendant, and said petition alleging that "on divers occasions from January 3rd 1903 to May 14th 1903 the defendant herein bought from the plaintiff herein in numerous articles of coal and feed-stuffs amounting to \$207.59. Plaintiff would further show to the court that at divers times and occasions from July 8th 1902 to August 28th 1903, the defendant herein bought of Wright Gamble & Co. numerous articles of merchandise amounting to \$45.58 which last account for a valuable consideration has been duly sold and transferred to the plaintiff herein. Both of which accounts are owned by the plaintiff, which accounts are both long past due and unpaid to plaintiff's damage in the sum of \$253.17 as shown by verified accounts filed in this cause, and prays for judgment of the court for said amount for costs and for general relief.

Herein fail not, but have before said court, at its aforesaid next regular term, this writ, with your return thereon, showing how you have executed the same.

Witness, J. H. Garrison, Clerk of the County Court of Randall county.

Given under my hand, and the seal of said Court, at office in Canyon City this 7th day of June A. D. 1904.

J. H. Garrison,
Clerk, County Court, Randall County.
By C. N. Harrison, Deputy.

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